



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Speech of Ms. Eva Biaudet, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, at the 18th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, Session 3: New Threats to Security, in Nyborg on 1 September 2009

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished participants, dear friends and colleagues,

As you all know, various forms of slavery and exploitation have been part of most of human history. In this sense trafficking is not a “new threat”. Instead, it is our understanding of the concept of security that has widened to include also human security.

From this point of view, the OSCE is a “modern” organisation. From its beginning in 1975, it has adopted a comprehensive security approach where human security and state security are intertwined. Trafficking in human beings threatens both. OSCE as an organisation has been a pioneer in working against trafficking. We have a strong mandate from all 56 participating States. There has been a Ministerial Council Decision specifically on trafficking every year since 2000, which itself highlights the strong political commitment given by the governments. But, as you as politicians very well know, this work cannot be outsourced to the international organisations. Every government needs a systematic strategy and specific efforts to fight this modern-day slavery. I will return to this later in my presentation.

Trafficking for sexual exploitation is the most common type of trafficking globally, especially in Europe. Globally, 80% of identified victims had been trafficked for sexual exploitation. The “classical” scenario of traffickers luring girls or young women with false prospects of love and marriage or simply of a good salary and better life and then forcing them into prostitution is a reality in our world, including here in the Baltic Sea region

As an example, let me refer to the Copenhagen Post of July 2 this year:

The Western High Court in Århus today increased the guilty sentence of a man and woman sentenced to prison for keeping two teenage Slovakian girls in their house as sex slaves. The case began in March 2008, when a 17-year-old Slovakian girl went to the police and accused the couple of keeping her in their apartment where men paid the couple to have sex with her. When police raided the address they found another Slovakian girl aged 19 in similar circumstances. The two teens had been promised a good job and better life in Denmark and they willingly came here with the couple.

The girls were forced to having sex with up to eight men a day and earned at least 200,000 kroner for the Århus couple. The 17-year-old became pregnant as a result.

I think if we all for a moment paused to concretely think about what these girls have experienced, no-one could remain unengaged. Victims are beaten, raped, locked up in inhuman conditions without food, water and sanitation, they are threatened and tortured. All to keep them under the complete control of the trafficker.

Victims of trafficking indeed show similar symptoms of trauma as victims of torture. They are so traumatised they cannot remember what happened to them. New research shows that they may need up to six months of recovery and support before they are able to be helpful in police investigations or share anything of what they have gone through. For child victims it is even more serious: a recent study from the UK showed it can last over 18 months before a child starts to talk about the trafficking experience. This is the case even in situations with a child protection professional who is actively trying to help the child. This is essential information for both law enforcement and social workers to understand for them to become more successful in helping the victims and solving the crime.

Women's commodification through trafficking is facilitated if local custom and law treat women as property, but it is also facilitated by the global sex industry, which normalizes exploitation of people, mostly women and children. The Nordic and UK model of addressing demand through legislation is a promising practice to oppose this line of thinking and to limit exploitation. Quite often I hear that the exploitation of human beings in the sex market or labour market is a fact of life and that it cannot be changed. People tell me we should just focus on harm reduction and stopping the most serious forms of organised crime. To me this is very cynical and disregards the protection of every person's human rights and freedoms.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have all heard about cases where foreign workers have not been paid and have been exploited in inhuman working and living conditions. Let me again refer to a case reported in the media, on the website of NRK, the Norwegian TV. A couple organised work in Norway for a woman from Sri Lanka. The couple kept her salary and she was prevented from leaving the couple's home after working hours while being forced to work as a domestic servant. The woman was constantly threatened and was not paid for any of her work. This case is now being investigated as the first case of domestic slavery to be tried in a Norwegian court.

There are many other examples of labour exploitation in factories or restaurants, in construction or domestic work, in open-air markets and for agricultural labour, such as picking fruit or vegetables, or even wild forest berries, as is the case in many Nordic countries.

My office recently organized a seminar on trafficking for forced labour in the agricultural sector with experts and participants from most OSCE participating States. Our seminar was based on a groundbreaking study on Human Trafficking for Labour Exploitation in the Agricultural Sector. The seminar showed that in-country domestic trafficking for forced labour in the agricultural sector does indeed exist in the OSCE region, and that slavery and trafficking do not exist in a vacuum. In fact, overall poor working conditions provide a growing ground for slavery-like practices and trafficking. This is why labour protection and

labour inspection also in secluded sectors of labour is particularly important. If exploitation is tolerated and facilitated, there will always be trafficking.

Migration is and will be necessary, and can be very positive for societies and empowering for the migrating individual. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remind ourselves that, for instance, the lack of knowledge of language and of society's structures, economic distress, and low level of education, can put people at risk of exploitation. We need therefore to put migrant empowering functions in place to prevent exploitation – in the worst case slavery – from happening.

On my country visits I have again and again encountered the phenomenon of hundreds, or even thousands, of missing children, now also documented in various reports. "Europe's lost children", the disappearing of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers is a serious and growing human rights violation and a trafficking threat. According to a report by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, the problem is documented in many EU countries, including in Ireland, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK and Denmark. It is likely that many of these children are victims of human trafficking. We believe traffickers use the asylum centres as "holding places" for trafficked children and pick them up, often within 24 hours, and then put them in prostitution, street begging, petty crime, and domestic slavery.

The modus operandi of traffickers is illustrated by a Dutch ("Koolvis") case as recently reported by the Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings. About 30 female unaccompanied Nigerian minor asylum seekers disappeared from reception centres in the Netherlands between 2005 and 2006. In a large investigation it was found out that the Netherlands was used by Nigerian criminal organisations as a transit country for trafficking into Italy and Spain. Nigerian girls were recruited in Nigeria and were promised a job in Europe – some were told they would have to engage in prostitution – but they all had to promise to repay the travel costs to the traffickers (amounting to 30,000-50,000€). To strengthen the deal, the girls had to swear an oath in front of a voodoo priest. The girls arrived in the Netherlands by plane and immediately threw away all their travel and identity documents so that they could not be identified and their travel not traced. Next they reported themselves to the Dutch authorities at the airport and applied for asylum in order to get a temporary residence permit. Some of the girls also claimed they were victims of trafficking, in order to qualify for the special protection measures in place for victims of human trafficking. Once the girls were placed in asylum centres or shelters, they called a number given to them by the traffickers, and were then collected from the shelter by the traffickers. They then were put in prostitution, in the Netherlands, Spain or Italy. The Netherlands engaged in a large international investigation, and managed to arrest several of these traffickers. Preventative measures were also put in place both at the country of origin and destination and as a result, there are almost no cases anymore of Nigerian unaccompanied minors arriving by plane to the Netherlands.

Also in Norway the authorities were able to put a stop to a similar child trafficking pattern by immediately putting the children in protective compulsory custody so that the traffickers could no reach them and to protect the children from running away into the hands of the traffickers. When the traffickers lost their means of income, they changed routes, avoiding Norway.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We stand in front of a whole lot of new threats. Organised crime is taking new forms and their various illegal activities, corruption, terrorism and even the business around pirated CDs and DVDs, can be linked to trafficking in human beings. At the same time, economic inequalities and the widening gap between the rich and the poor are exacerbated by the economic crisis, with growing migration flows, often irregular and rising, putting people at increased risk of different kinds of exploitation. In many parts of the world there exists a vast reservoir of people with no sustainable income or livelihood. The mere scale of numbers, lack of options and awareness ensures there will always be plenty of potential victims, despite all our awareness-raising and prevention efforts. A perfect market for traffickers is created when a growing demand for ever cheaper labour is combined with little respect for the human dignity of desperate people in need.

It was very interesting yesterday to hear the presentation of the BSPC Working Group on the labour market and social welfare. The good experiences of cross-border commuters could also be used in a broader context of migration. However, it would be useful if migration information offices also incorporated human trafficking information to potential migrants, such as check-up of future employers, working conditions, reporting of experiences, and information where to find help in case of abuse.

The fight against trafficking in human beings threatens personal security, social coherence and our human values. I am very pleased to hear that there is a suggestion for new working group on human security within the BSPC. I think it would be useful if the working group could look for concrete measures and tools to improve the effectiveness of our fight against trafficking in this particular region. Some questions to examine could be, for instance:

Firstly, how to create systematic strategies and structures to make the fight against trafficking more effective and how to enable these structures to function in regional dialogue. I believe we need to become better at self-monitoring our efforts and assessing their success. We need accountability in order to ensure that what we do is effective, reaches the aimed target, and that when that we scale up, we do it in the best possible way. That is why I am advocating for the National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism, recommended by the OSCE participating States for many years. The establishment of a National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism will also at the same time support and facilitate the international monitoring function of the Council of Europe that is being started. I have brought with me copies of my Annual Report of last year, which analyses how countries use the basic working tools OSCE recommends for countries to use: National Action Plans, National Coordinators and the National Rapporteurs.

Secondly, how to improve victim support and international cooperation to assist victims. Not just in terms of policing and judicial cooperation, but also how to cooperate to provide social support and victim assistance at the local level. The role of NGOs has proven to be crucial. Support must be based on victims' needs, and be swift, as the trauma may become worse if assistance is delayed.

Thirdly, how to create particular measures, structures and actions to prevent child trafficking and assist child victims, ensuring the best interest of the child. It is urgent to create capacity to stop the disappearance of trafficked children.

Fourthly, how to strengthen action of prevention through creating a hostile environment for traffickers and empowering vulnerable populations. It is necessary to address also the long-term factors that facilitate trafficking: i.e. vulnerability in different forms; discrimination be it gendered or of ethnic origin; economic inequalities; exploitative environments, and; corruption and organised crime.

My Office is organising a conference on prevention on 14-15 September in Vienna. We intend to look at current efforts and gaps to prevent human trafficking. I warmly welcome all of you to participate in the conference.

To conclude,

Respect for human dignity, equality and social responsibility are worth fighting for. Trafficking erodes these basic values. When trafficking occurs it is always a failure of society. When the failure is due to a lack of effective counter-trafficking measures, the government bears the responsibility. The victim must never be blamed.

The Baltic Sea region is a specific region with good opportunities to together fight this modern-day slavery of trafficking. You as parliamentarians are in a key position to place trafficking high on the political agenda. Please do.

Thank you.